



MATERIAL / MODULE FOR THE TRAINING OF SPECIALIZED EXECUTIVES IN THE APPROACH OF PROBLEMS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE FIELD OF LOCAL COMMUNITY (NEIGHBOURHOOD, MUNICIPALITY, PREFECTURE)

## **BULGARIA: Survey Findings <sup>1</sup>**

### ***A. Demographical data***

Following the terms of the project, in April-May 2005 an investigation was carried out among 100 persons working on the problems of intercultural communication; it was based on standardized for Bulgaria questionnaires and personal interviews in the following regions and municipalities:

Sofia – 18 persons, Plovdiv – 10, Ruse – 10, Blagoevgrad – 8, Varna – 9, Stara Zagora – 8, Shumen – 8, Burgas – 8, Kurdzali – 6, Smolian – 5, Turnovo – 5, Karlovo – 3. The regions were selected by a hypothesis of the specificity of the social, ethnical and intercultural problems, which express the main types of relations in this context:

- Sofia as a capital with the highest concentration of services and cases;
- Plovdiv, Varna, Ruse, Stara Zagora, Burgas and Turnovo – as administrative centers with serious social problems in the transition period (deindustrialization, change of labour profile, unemployment, Roma ghettos, multiethnic population);
- Shumen, Kurdzali, Karlovo – similar to the above, but with fixed presence of different types of Turkish and Roma-population;
- Blagoevgrad and Smolian – border administrative centers of municipalities with Bulgarian and Bulgarian-Muslim population.

For every region were selected:

- Representatives of social or health aid institutions in regional or municipal administrations;
- Representatives of educational institutions, conducting trainings or helping the social services in their work;
- Representatives of NGOs with respective profiles.

Because of the specificity of the problems, representatives of the police departments were interviewed in some municipalities as well as private firms and voluntary associations, working on the problems of the intercultural integration.

According to their workplace the interviewees were separated as follows (Questions - Q 1-3):

- Social support – 42;
- Municipality – 18;
- Regional administration – 8;
- NGOs – 12;
- Educational departments – 10, (namely Universities – 4, Schools – 6);
- Health services – 6;
- RDI (Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior) – 4.

Most of the people (84) worked on local level, 12 – on national and only 4 – on international level. The bigger part of the people belonged to the public sector – 74, to which

<sup>1</sup> See also BGreport.ppt, which contains systematized data of investigation.



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we can add 12 more employees, working for the national administration – mainly in the regional managements and the police, and 12 in NGOs. In Bulgaria the private business sector does not show any interest, for the time being, in the problems of the intercultural communication and that is the reason why a small number of this group was selected – only 3; the same refers to the volunteers.

The facts from Qs 30-35 can be added to the profile of the inquired people, which give the common characterization of the employee in this field: average age of 40-45 years, mostly women – 68 against 32 men, with indicated Bulgarian origin – 88, 6 did not indicate their origin (in Smolian – 2, Kurdzali – 2, Sofia – 2), 6 identified as Turkish (in Kurdzali, Shumen and Sofia) and one - as Roma. Almost everyone had a university education – 96, 7 of them had doctoral (PhD) or higher degree, one had a college education and three – secondary education. The professional field of most of them was social services – 41, 21 were employed in the sphere of education, in administration – 10, 9 worked as psychologists, 6 were in the health services, the same number of people worked as lawyers, 4 worked in the police and 3 were technical assistants. 51 were social employees, administrators – 10, expert-psychologists – 8, project managers – 9, teachers (lecturers, educators) – 18, managers of firms – 2, technical assistants – 2.

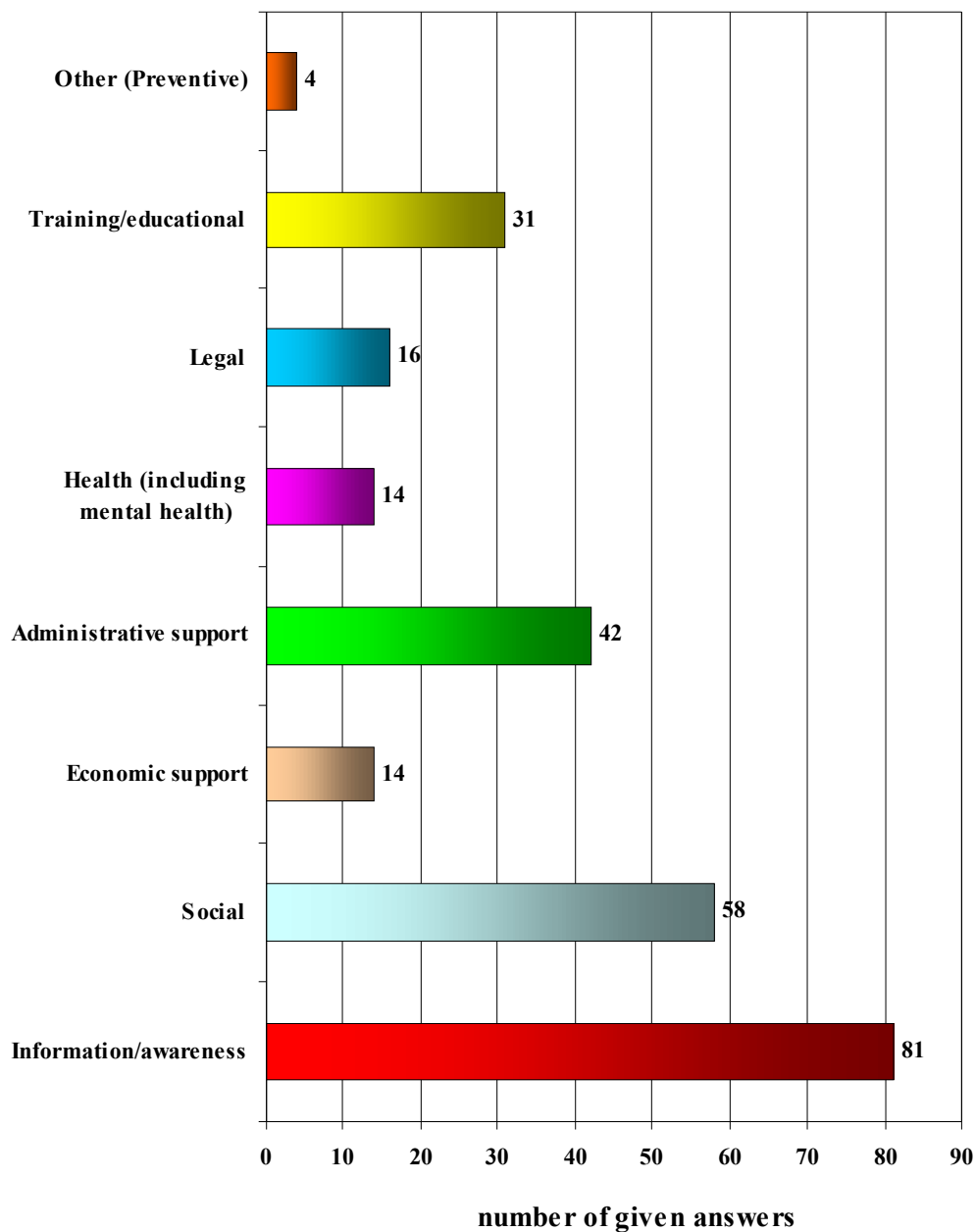
### ***B. Quantitative data and qualitative comments of answers received***

This sample refers to the profile of the employees in the field and can be accepted as representative for Bulgaria. In this sense the results of the investigation have a representative character, too, the more so as they were all gathered in face to face interviews.

The type of services which the respective institutions offer, according to the answers of Q 4 looks like this:



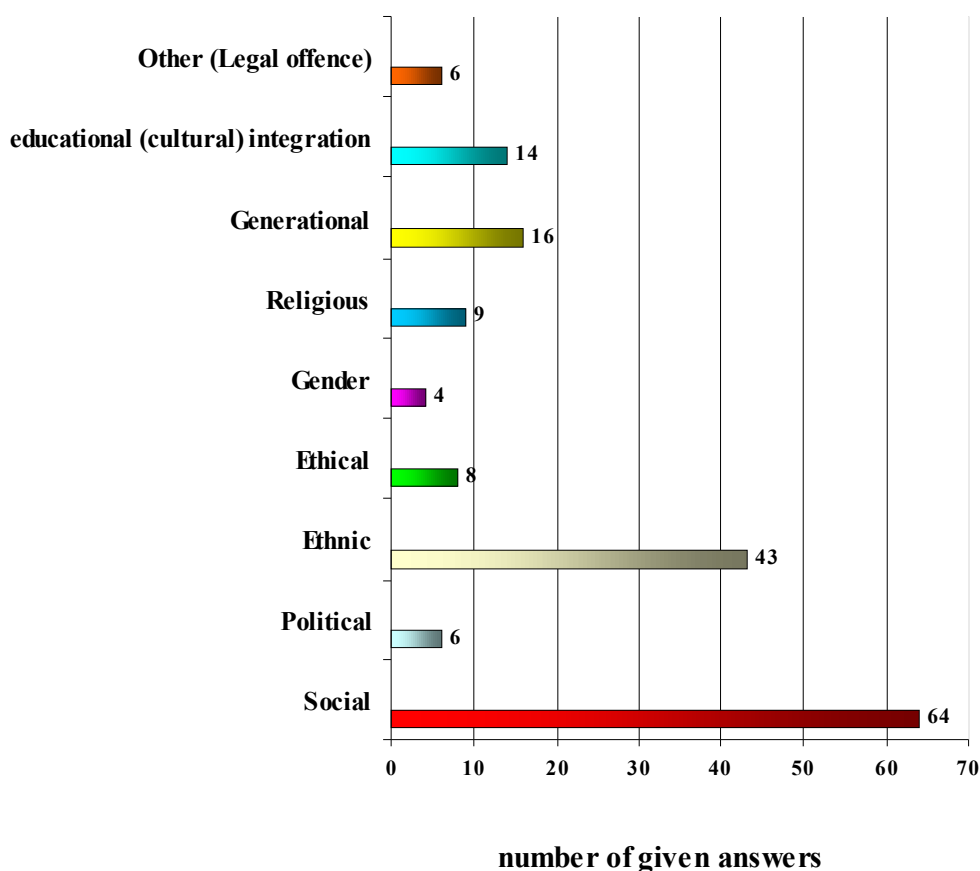
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This structure of services explains probably the most typical problems, identified by Q 5: they are social and ethnic, all others have no major influence in the intercultural communication:



This concentration of types of problems reflects on the high number of negative answers (52) to Q 6 about the knowledge of specific actions/practices, which are realized in the social field and are destined for solving these problems, while the other 48 answers are positive. Government programs are indicated as specific practices (Q 7, – basically the social project “From social benefits to employment”, which was oriented to people with very low qualifications – 18 references; the early inclusion, especially of Roma children, through school and extracurricular activities is also indicated as effective and familiar form of integration – 18, as well as joint seminars and discussions of people from different ethnical origin. The social characteristics of the problems have been forgotten particularly in this case. That is why the



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percentage of indicated voluntary and supporting actions is low – only 8, as well as the preventive work – only 6, this, however, again in the context of the problem with the Roma and hiring their representatives on service in the police. Donor actions are mentioned as effective and successful 8 times only. There are also answers from the type of art therapy, opening asylums or centers for abandoned old people, but they are only exceptions and do not have any special reference to the inter-culture issue.

However the professional duties and interests of the employees also involve mostly the one-typed suggestions for actions, which should be undertaken in connection with the intercultural interaction in the local community. They have social character and are linked mainly with decreasing the unemployment - 12, activities with educational character – 16, but most of all activities about labour, social and educational integration of the Roma. Obviously this is a main problem of the social services and a main reference point in the perception on the “inter-culture” subject. In fact, one should mention here some important things, which are the background for understanding the results.

The term “intercultural” is perceived in the Bulgarian language from the concept of “culture”, which works in the broad range from “representative of civilization” to “the ability to cultural filling in a document”. Here one can notice the orientation of the problems of inter-culture mostly to the work and the problems with the Roma population, whose inability to integrate in the Bulgarian society sometimes is explained with the completely different cultural and civilizational type of this paranational ethnic group. Therefore the integration not rarely is understood as assimilation, in contrast, for example, to the attitude to the Turkish population, which is accepted as competitive, but however comprehensible and acceptable culture. On daily level the long-term co-existence of Bulgarians and Turks within the country has set up many common adjustments, expressed in the commonly used and intelligible term “komshija” (en: “neighbour”). It is referred to a separate person, as well as to the country itself. Culturally the Roma are out of this neighborly context, although they in large number penetrate in the Bulgarian land together with the Turks. That is why the problems of inter-culture are being “state ethnized” and individualized, while the individualization directly follows the common characteristics of the adjustment towards the community, whose ultimate manifestation is the state. In this sense the answers are as if they are answers of the ruling national mind, which also includes the culture. It is remarkable, for example, the rather low importance of factors as religion, age or gender in the understanding of intercultural relations by the social servants.

Comparisons between very different successful practices are offered, and also in the different fields different suggestions are received. For example, in the bigger cities there was a talk about the establishment of new institutions and acquaintance with successful practices, while in the smaller ones having clear interethnic problems, more informal meetings with representatives of different ethnical, religious or age groups were conducted. A considerable part of the interviewees however noticed that the parameters of their activity were officially determined and any innovations out of the regulations were a rarity.

Undoubtedly this is also a consequence of the rather low specialized qualification – only 43 of the interviewees had participated in respective seminars and courses, 23 had taken part in such events organised mostly on national level, selected from municipalities – 19, and from the region – 12. The low number of participants in international qualification programs is impressive – only 6. The participants in such programs were mostly from the capital and the



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bigger administrative centers. Organizers of the trainings most frequently were NGOs – 21 items, followed by governmental organisations – 16 and educational institutions – 14. The local authorities and foreign organizations participate rarely in this process – respectively with 6 and 4 answers. If we see the self-appraisal of the own qualification – facts from 20th question, where only 38 noticed some gaps, we will not be surprised that the initiative for participating in respective courses usually belongs to the employer – 26 times, against 16 times – 'by own desire'. As regards the NGOs an initiative for participating in respective courses was raised only for 7 persons, and from trade unions – 0. What is typical, at least for Bulgaria, is that the place of work, which is a natural field for intercultural interaction, obviously does not play this function. These problems stay out of the special attention of the professional organizations and trade unions, i.e. the intercultural interaction is accepted as a problem of the free time. In this respect, it can be marked also one attendant theme, concerning the professional self-confidence of the officially engaged with the problem people, i.e. the sense of misjudgment of the importance of their job. It is registered among most of the interviewed, many of whom expect external help and rely on requirements and practices from the European Union. In this sense it can be claimed that one common training program is expected by them not only as increasing the qualifications, but also as giving proof of the importance of their job.

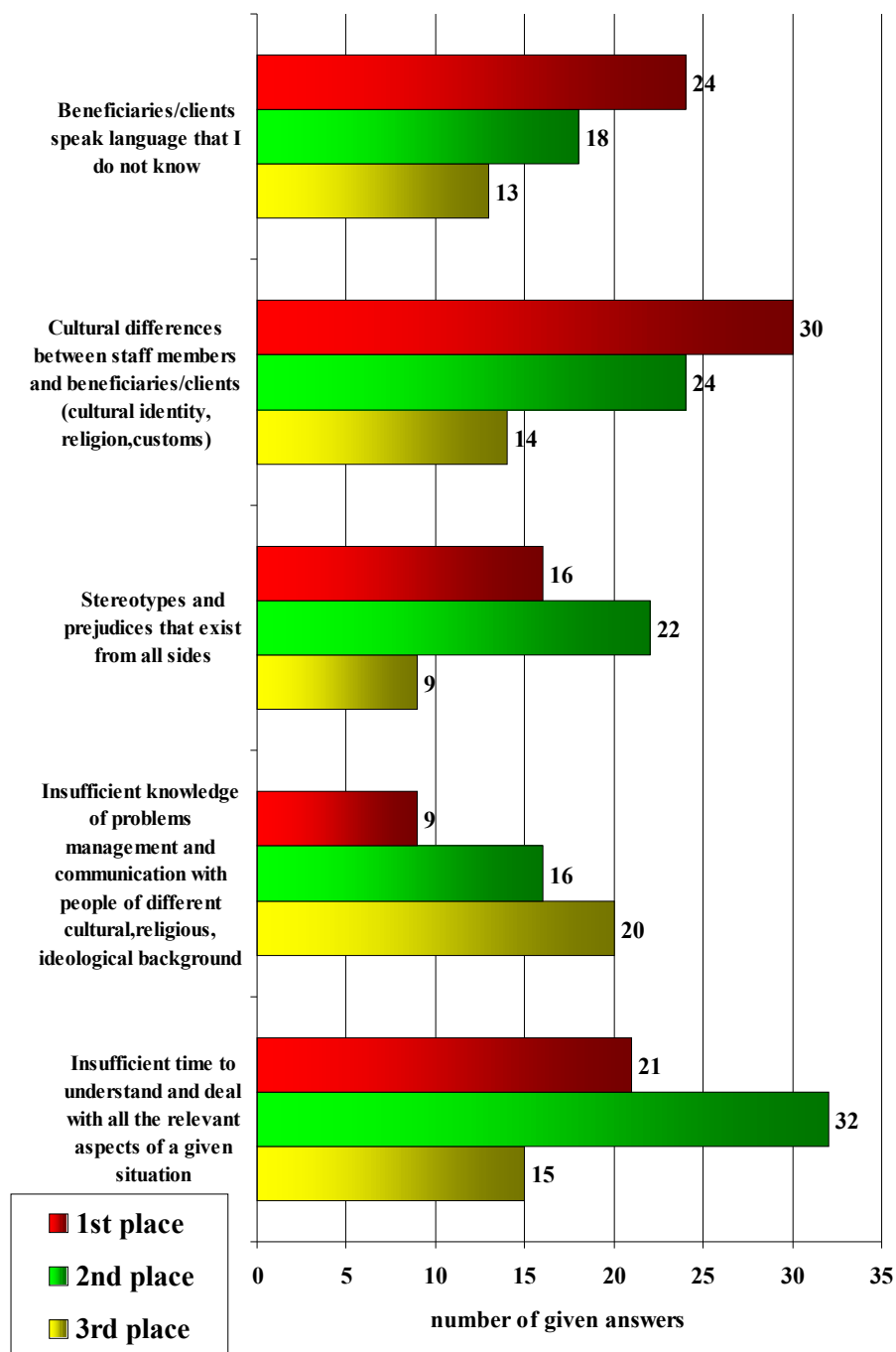
It is obvious that such qualification is necessary as far as according to the answers the confrontation with problems of intercultural communication is rather frequent in the professional life of the employees in the social services.

| Very frequently | Often | Sometimes | Seldom | Never |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| 6               | 34    | 41        | 16     | 3     |



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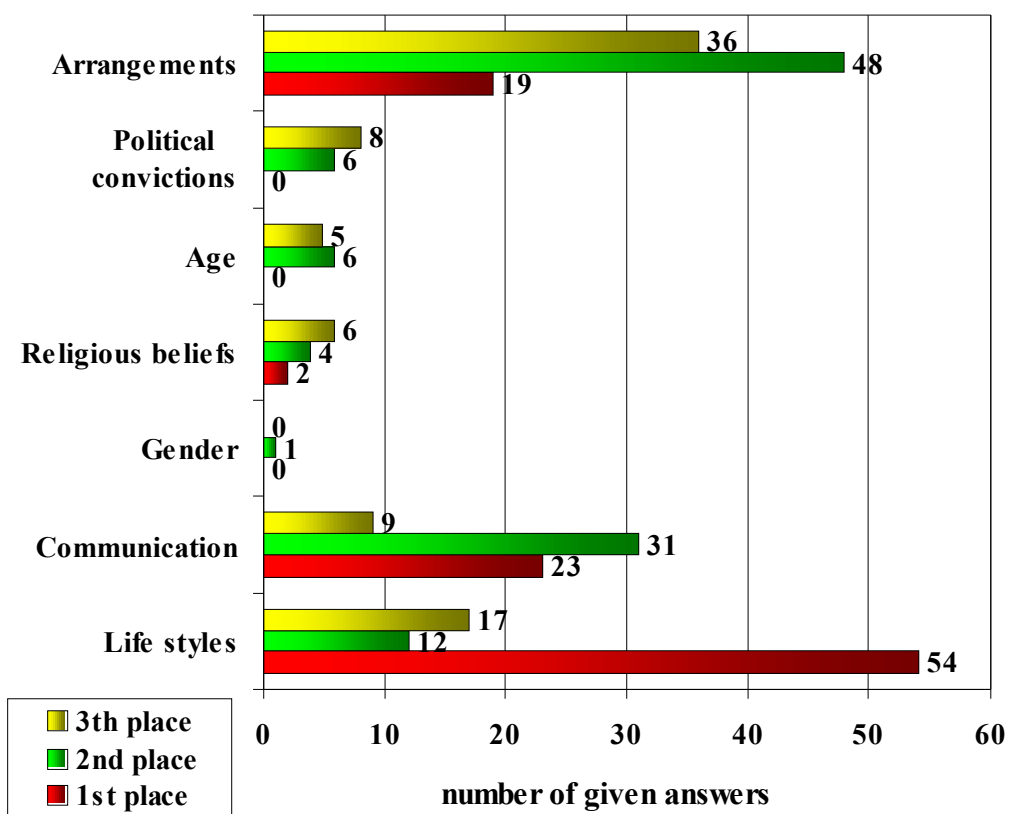
By degree of importance the problems are seen as it follows (Q 14):





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Everybody also point many difficulties in the intercultural communication (Q 15):

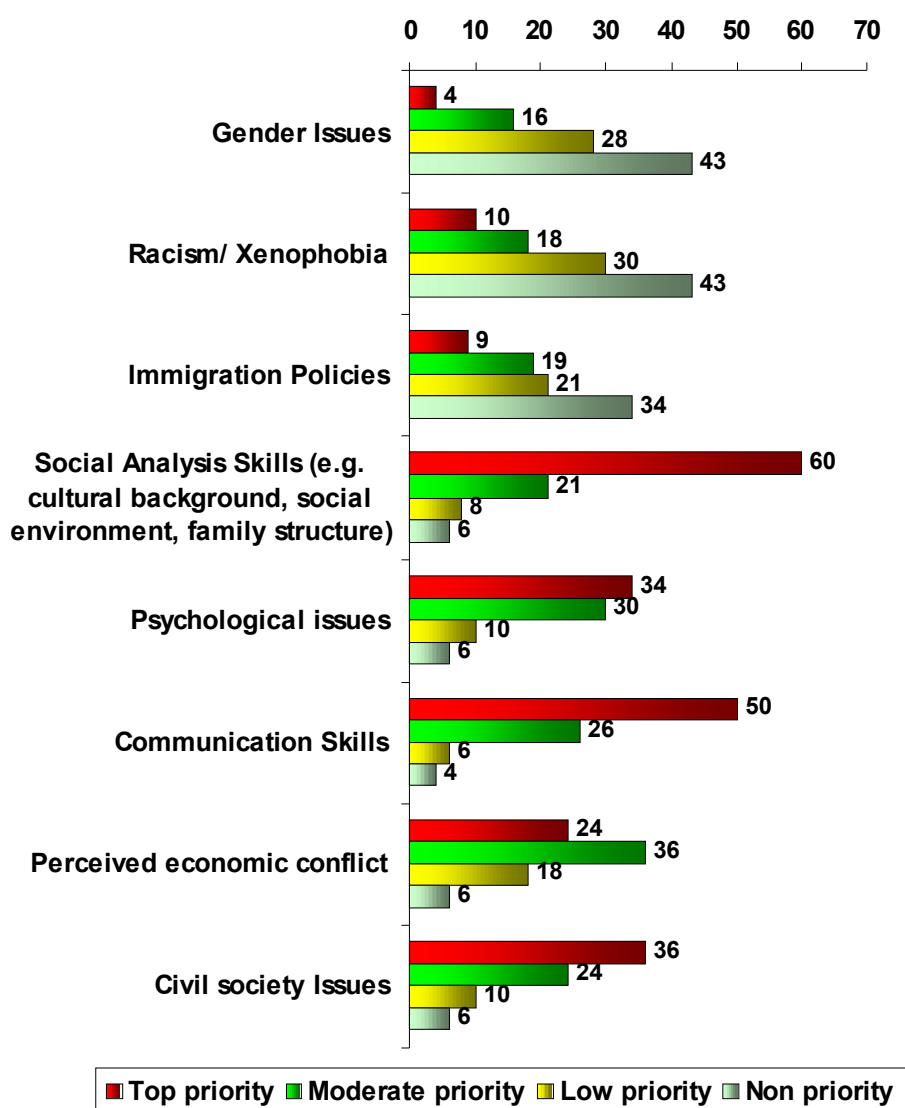






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The explanations in most of the cases are from psychological nature – steadiness of the adjustments, close relation between everyday attitudes and professional behaviour, as well as lack of time to go deep into the problems. For most of the employees the biggest problem is the formalization of social cases, each experienced by them and by their clients as unique. However, the social and the psychological problems turned out to be problems with priority (Q 16-17).





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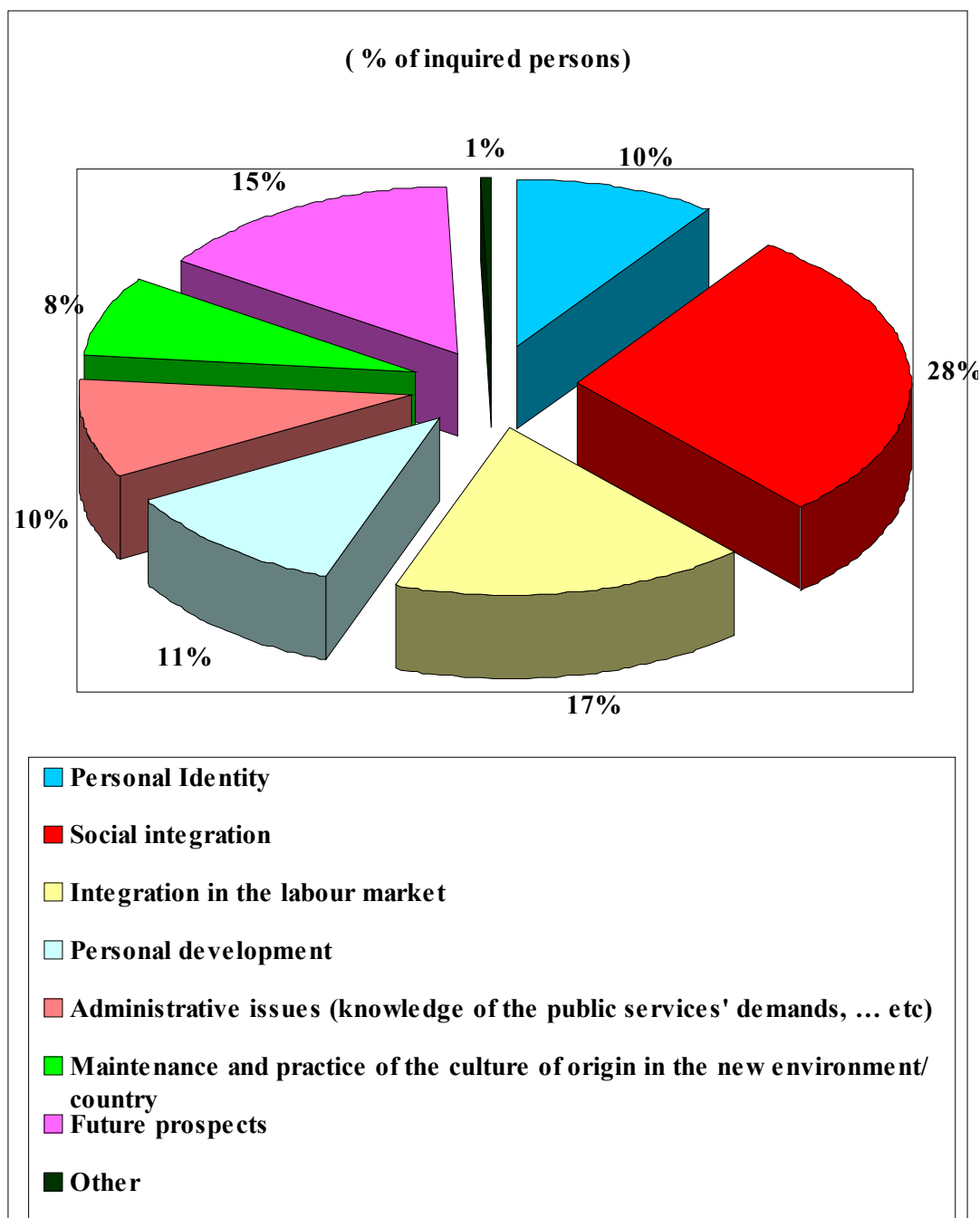
Rarely new themes are suggested: ecological problems – 4 times, private educational – 6 times and problems of the social adaptation, obviously assuming different degree of adaptation ability – 3 times. Undoubtedly this is a consequence of the lack of specialized training and knowledge, as well as of several typical special features of the employees in Bulgaria.

Like everyone working in closed and with low influence social service, working on “utter and private cases”, most of the people showed, together with the mentioned symptom of misjudgment, the self-confidence of well educated people, who had not applied their knowledge, because of circumstances beyond their control. For this reason they showed, on the other side, amazing self-confidence (Q’s 19 – 23): they rated too high their own abilities. Most of them stated that they had completely adequate qualifications to cope with the problems – over 55%, 36 admitted to have a few gaps, 64 – that they had not; and if they agreed to allow in their job specially trained people, they set a series of requirements, i.e. to have administrative abilities, some length of service, etc.

Probably for that reason the pointed disadvantages in the job are information-communicational and not operational: lack of information – 64 references, good communication abilities – 32; good at management of conflicts – 16 and solving causes – 8. It also motivates the expectations from one course – it should give common practical abilities – 26 interviewed, but first of all to inform (21) and to adapt the European practice – 24. Far behind remain the development of projects for solving problems and overcoming conflicts with 6 to 8 references. The 12 answers for the need of special courses of Roma language and culture, appearing in different fields, confirm the shifting of the inter-culture mainly to the problems with the Roma population.

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The reflexive answers, referring to the understandings of the needs of the beneficiaries confirm these results (Q's 24; 28). According to the employees in the social services the private motives of their clients look like this (Q 26):





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The problems again are socially oriented, which obtains its ideological identification of the answers to the importance of the listed values for the effectiveness of the job (Q 27):

